

No More - Prequel to The Best Man

by Mrs Weasley

Category: Harry Potter

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-27 08:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-27 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 17:40:45

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,102

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

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>
Disclaimers: These characters belong to JK Rowling, apart from a few I've added.

>This is a song-fic (I've never done one of those before!). The song is "No More", by Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, from the musical "Into the Woods". The lyrics are used here without permission, but if you are Stephen Sondheim, James Lapine or their publisher, please don't sue me!

>Author's Notes: This short story is a *PREQUEL* to my 7-part story "The Best Man" (recently posted). This story happens 2 years after Harry leaves Hogwarts, and "The Best Man" happens 6 years later still.
Warning: Major Angst Ahead, Harry's POV.

>

>No More.

>* * * * *

>No more questions.
Please.

>No more tests.
Comes the day you say, "What for?"

>Please - no more.

>* * * * *

>I look out of the train window. Trees and fields are rushing past, speeding me on my sad journey. It is a long way from Hogsmeade, in the north, to Ottery St Catchpole, and it seems likely that it will be dark by the time I arrive in Devon.

>Tomorrow, the Hogsmeade Hurricanes will have to win their Quidditch match without me. My team-mates were very understanding, even though this weekend's match may be crucial to our chances of winning the league title. Some things are more important than sporting victories.

>The window glass is cold against the side of my face. I lean on the glass, and think about the moment two days ago when I heard the bad news. I can remember it all too vividly. I was at home, in my cottage

on the outskirts of Hogsmeade. I was catching up with laundry, thinking about match tactics and wondering if Ron would make it to the game as he had promised. It was then that the telephone - my favourite Muggle invention - rang. From the moment I heard Hermione's voice, I knew that something was seriously wrong.

>"Harry? I hoped you'd be there. I was going to send you an owl, but I couldn't just - write it down - I really wanted to speak to you -"
Her voice caught and she faltered to a stop.

>"What's happened? Is something wrong?" I asked, stupidly.

>"It's - there's been a terrible accident. Well, not accident exactly, it was - it was -"

>"Mione. Take it easy. What happened, and where?

>"It's B - Bill. He's d-dead."

>"Bill? Bill Weasley, you mean? How?"

>"He - He was at Gringotts - breaking curses on some of those vaults that used to belong to Voldemort's supporters. You know the Ministry wanted the vaults opened, so they could confiscate what was inside? They got Bill to break the curses - one of them must have been booby-trapped - there was an explosion, and Bill and all the goblins who were down there with him, were - killed."

>"Oh God, 'Mione -"

>"There's been a lot of damage in Diagon Alley -" She broke off again, sounding more upset than I have ever heard her.

>"How's Ron?" I asked quickly, wondering how this family tragedy will affect our closest friend.

>There was a long pause, and when I heard her voice again, I knew that there was more wrong than Bill's death. "He - he won't talk to me, Harry. I was with him when they - they sent for him to go to Diagon Alley - but they couldn't find anything for him to identify. He's gone down to The Burrow now, but he wouldn't let me come with him. We - we had a row. He was feeling terrible - about the Enforcers not stopping this happening - and when I told him it wasn't his fault, he - he yelled at me -"

>When she stopped speaking, I thought about my two friends. For most of the last four years, before and after leaving Hogwarts, they have been an "item", without excluding me from our friendship. I haven't seen them as much as I would like to - I am in Hogsmeade, most of the time during the Quidditch season, while they are mostly in London - Ron completing his training with the Magical Law Enforcement Squad, Hermione doing research in the wizard libraries, and making trips abroad - she has just started writing a book. But I know that when she is in London they see each other often, and that despite their still-frequent arguments they care about each other very much. I can understand why Hermione would be upset that Ron would shut her out in this time of trouble.

>"C-could you go down to Devon, Harry?" she asked then, sounding subdued, and not at all like the self-possessed Hermione I know. "And see if he'll talk to you?"

>I didn't hesitate before agreeing. And so it is that I am on this train.

>I didn't know Bill that well - only as Ron's eldest brother. His work for Gringotts took him abroad a lot, and I only met him occasionally at Weasley family gatherings - the last one was Charlie's wedding to Susan, last year. The Weasleys have treated me like one of their family since I was twelve - the least I can do now is try to help them in their time of sorrow. I can imagine what they are going through.

>It is ironic that this should happen now - just when most of us were managing to put the past behind us. What happened in my seventh year

at Hogwarts was so dreadful that I, for one, have spent the last two years trying to forget about it. So many lives lost, including many irreplaceable people - Albus Dumbledore - Hagrid - and most of all, Sirius - I still sometimes wake up seeing the look on his face as he died to save me.

>Most people in the wizarding world would tell you that it was a famous victory. We "won", didn't we? Voldemort was gone, this time, perhaps, forever. His followers were dead, like Lucius Malfoy, or had disappeared, like Severus Snape. Hogwarts would go on, under the leadership of Minerva McGonagall, and we in the wizarding world could live without constant fear.

>So why did I feel so sickened?

>Everyone expected me to continue fighting the leftover followers of the Dark Arts. Ron urged me to join him in training to be an Enforcer. The Ministry offered me a variety of jobs. But I was tired of constantly fighting, tired of always looking out for danger. I wanted to forget about it all, and being an Enforcer would have surrounded me with constant reminders. So I accepted two other offers. One, to play Quidditch with the Hogsmeade Hurricanes; and two, to write a weekly Quidditch column for the "Daily Prophet". Some people were surprised, but I've never regretted it, and I've even started to enjoy life again. I don't think Sirius, or Dumbledore, or my parents, or any of the others, would grudge me that. I felt as though I had done my bit to help. I'd had enough.

>So why does this have to happen now?

>* * * * *

>No more riddles.
No more jests.

>No more curses you can't undo,
Left by fathers you never knew.

>No more quests.
No more feelings.

>Time to shut the door.
Just - no more.

>
* * * * *

>
"We have all come here to remember Bill. He was a good son - a good brother - and a good friend. I would like to invite anyone who wants to speak about Bill to come forward."

>
I look around the circle of mourners, dressed in black, and gathered around the small heap of flowers. Ironically, it is a bright, sunny day. The sky is blue, and the scents of spring and new growth fill the air as we stand in the little paddock above The Burrow. Because of the way Bill had died, the Weasleys cannot have a funeral - his body was not recovered from the explosion. And so they have decided to have this memorial ceremony for him.

>
My gaze turns from one person to another. First, Mr. Weasley, grey-faced and stricken with grief, but trying to remain dignified. Mrs. Weasley, usually so cheerful and brisk, is leaning on his arm and suddenly looking much older. Bill's brothers and sister are grouped next to her - Charlie and his wife Susan, their arms around each other; Percy, solemn and shocked, with his fiancée Penelope; Fred and George, subdued and far from laughter, standing next to each other in their black ties. Ron, who has hardly spoken all day, his face set and his mouth in a tight line, has his arm around Ginny, who has been crying softly and continually, her fair skin blotched by tears and her eyes red-rimmed.

>
There are teachers from Hogwarts, and friends of Bill's from his schooldays and from Gringotts. There are people from the village; family friends who had known Bill since he was a little boy. They have all come here to remember him.

>
Professor McGonagall is the next to speak. Grim-faced, she nods to everyone as she steps forward. "I remember the day Bill started at Hogwarts," she begins. "He was very keen to prove himself, the eldest

of his family. He worked hard, did well and made many friends. Six years later we appointed him Head Boy, and he proved to be an excellent choice - one of the best Head Boys we've ever had. We will all remember him with affection." Her normally stern voice quavers a little as she finishes, places the flowers she holds on the growing pile, and steps back.

>
A burly, brown-haired young man steps forward next. I had not met him before today, but I immediately recognised a likeness to my old Quidditch captain, Oliver Wood. This is Oliver's elder brother, Nicholas, who was in Bill's year at Hogwarts.

>
"Bill was my best friend," Nicholas begins. "We met on the Hogwarts Express the day we started our first year there, and we've been friends ever since. I remember lots of incidents from our Hogwarts days. Once, Bill accidentally turned my hair green in Charms and I had to stay that way for a week. I got my own back by making his broomstick fly in circles for the next three flying lessons before he worked out it was me who was doing it. When - When we were still at school, Bill used to talk about all the places he wanted to travel to, and when he went to work in Egypt he sent me long letters describing all the amazing things he'd seen. I know he really enjoyed his work. I'm going to miss him a lot." Nicholas brushes his sleeve across his eyes as he lays down his wreath and rejoins the circle.

>
Charlie Weasley is next, letting go of Susan and casting an anxious look towards his mother before he speaks. "Bill was my elder brother and I really admired him - we all did. When I started at Hogwarts I wanted to do as well as he was doing. He kept an eye on me, and stood up for me when I was just a first year getting picked on by some of the older kids. I wasn't as good at exams as he was, but Bill suggested me to the Gryffindor Quidditch captain in my second year, and suddenly I found something I really enjoyed. When I played my first match for the team, I could hear Bill cheering and yelling for me, and I knew he was really proud of me. In the last few years, I haven't seen him much because our work's taken us to different places, but I realise how much I'm going to miss him - and I know I speak for all of us - how much we're all going to miss our big brother."

>
* * * * *

>
Running away - let's do it,

>Free from the ties that bind.
No more despair

>Or burdens to bear
Out there in the yonder.

>
Running away - go to it.

>Where did you have in mind?
Have to take care:

>Unless there's a "where,"
You'll only be wandering blind.

>Just more questions,
Different kind.

>
* * * * *

>
One by one, the visitors are leaving. Breaking away from the subdued groups, who stand in the house and garden talking about Bill, they make their way over to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, uttering more words of consolation before taking their departure.

>
I have not had a chance to speak to Ron alone all day, but I approach him now, as he stands under a tree in the corner of the garden, looking at nothing.

>
"Ron," I say.

>
"Harry."

>
"I'm sorry - about Bill." Pathetically inadequate, but what else can I say?

>
"Yeah." He is still staring at nothing.

>
"I - um - I spoke to Hermione. She said you didn't want her to come down here. You had an argument?"

>
"Yes." He shifts, then, his eyes avoiding me uncomfortably, and he looks up into the branches of the tree.

>
"She's very upset. I think you should talk to her."

>
"There's nothing to talk about," he says flatly.

>
"Look, I know how you feel, but don't take it out on her -"

>
"Oh, shut up, Harry!" He looks at me at last, his eyes blazing with anger, hardly looking like the Ron I know, and I wonder if he will shut himself off from me too.

>
But he does talk to me, in the end. I suppose his attitude is what I should have expected. Ron has always been hard on himself. He feels as though he failed Bill. His job as an Enforcer is to prevent Dark wizards from hurting other people. Right now, it is useless to tell him there is nothing he could have done to prevent this. That booby-trap was probably set up years ago. Bill knew the risks of his job. Ron's still training for his. Deep down, he knows no Enforcer could have stopped this from happening, but it may be a while before he admits that to himself. All he wants now is to throw himself into his work and prevent the same thing happening to anyone else. He has a new determination I haven't seen in him before, and I wonder where it will take him.

>
Hermione was unlucky enough to be around when he was first coping with these feelings. I expect he will talk to her, in the end. They are forever quarrelling and making it up, although this time, I have to admit, it seems more serious. There is a lot of hurt on both sides. It may take a few months, but I know they love each other, deep down. I wish I had someone who cared about me, only me, in that way. I don't want someone to quarrel with, just someone to live peacefully with - a family...

>
When I leave Ron, I walk up the darkening garden towards the house, and meet Ginny standing by the murky pond. She is not crying now, but the marks of tears are still on her face. I join her, without saying anything.

>
"When I was three," she says suddenly, "Bill threw me in this pond for a joke. I was all right, but Mum was furious. She sent him to bed." She pauses, then continues, "He was mostly nice to me, though. He used to look out for me when the twins and Ron were teasing me." Her face crumples again suddenly. "Oh, Harry, I wish this hadn't happened."

>
"I know." I hug her, as she starts to cry again. At nineteen, she is almost as tall as I am. A curiously protective feeling comes over me, as I hold her and she sobs into my shoulder; a feeling I'm not used to, as if I can actually make someone's life better just by hugging them.

>
She draws away a little. "I'm sorry, Harry, I didn't mean to keep crying." She manages a very watery smile. "D-did you hear about Susan?"

>
"No, what?"

>
"She's p-pregnant."

>
"Really? That's great."

>
"Yes," says Ginny, her voice still rather shaky. "She just told me that if it's a girl, they're going to call her Eliza, but if it's a boy, they're going to call him - Bill."

>
We both stand and look at the pond for a few minutes without saying anything, before Ginny says, "It's going to be very difficult. Will you come and see us again, Harry?"

>
"Yeah, I'll come as often as I can," I promise her. And I will.

>
This is a terrible thing which has happened, but it's not going

to make me change my mind about my life. I'm not going to rush off and become an Enforcer with Ron. I am going to have my normal life. Tragedy or no tragedy, we have to carry on. There will be a match next week. There will be a column to write. If I work hard enough towards it, some day normality will return, not just for me but for my shattered friends.

>
I have to keep believing that.

>
And hope there will be no more tragedies to prevent it, reminding us of the past and souring the future.

>
* * * * *

>
No more giants,

>Waging war.
Can't we just pursue our lives

>With our children and our wives?
Till that happier day arrives,

>How do you ignore?
All the witches,

>All the curses,
All the wolves, all the lies,

>The false hopes, the goodbyes, the reverses,
All the wondering what even worse is

>Still in store?

>All the children...
All the giants...

>No more.

>
THE END

>
To find out what happened next, read my 7 part story "The Best Man", which takes up the same story 6 years later, and reveals how Harry, Ron and Hermione's lives have changed since Bill's death. It's not as gloomy as this one, I promise! Thanks to everyone who's said they enjoyed "The Best Man". Due to "popular demand" (ahem), I'm now working on the next part, which is going to be called "The Best Man II: The Search For Snape." But it may take a few weeks to finish that one, Real Life is a bit full at the moment.

End
file.